

## Center for *Children's* Advocacy

---

### TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SECTIONS 13-20, 27 OF RAISED BILL 5593, AN ACT CONCERNING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT

March 31, 2014

This testimony is submitted on behalf of the Center for Children's Advocacy, a statewide private, non-profit legal organization. The Center provides holistic legal representation for poor children in Connecticut's communities through individual representation and systemic advocacy. I am an attorney at the Center and Director of the Teen Legal Advocacy Project, which provides legal services to teens throughout the state, including an office in Warren Harding High School in Bridgeport, CT. It is because of our advocacy work with victims of teen dating violence at both the individual and systemic levels that **we urge you to support sections 13-20 and 27 of An Act Concerning Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault.**

Established in 2011, CT's Safe School Climate was developed with the specific purpose of shifting cultures in schools from those that attempt to fix bullying after it has occurred, to a positive climate where bullying is not tolerated. The "climates of respect" is meant to foster positive behavior and discourage any form of mean-spirited behaviors, either physically, emotionally, or intellectually. However, by only recognizing bullying, this policy fails to adequately address the serious problem of teen dating violence experienced by students throughout Connecticut schools. We have represented these students through our programs in Hartford and Bridgeport, and we believe the changes in 5593 will go far in addressing unsafe behaviors at the school level.

According to the 2011 Connecticut School Health Survey Youth Behavior Component Report, administered by the CT Department of Public Health, 16.7% of Connecticut students reported that they were emotionally abused by a boyfriend or girlfriend (e.g., called names, made fun of in front of others, ridiculed about their body or looks or told they were worthless). Additionally, 8.2% of high school students were hit, slapped, or physically hurt on purpose by a boyfriend or girlfriend. Nationally, nearly 1.5 million high school students experience physical abuse from a dating partner in a single year.

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, at least 19 states have laws that urge or require school boards to develop curricula on teen dating violence. Given the data we have available, Connecticut should also adopt laws to address the issue of teen dating violence in our safe school climate plan, track incidents, and provide support to districts in addressing teen dating violence.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,  
Stacey Violante Cote



#### **Board of Directors**

Douglas Colosky, Chair  
Claudia Connor, Vice Chair  
Jill J. Hutensky, Treasurer  
Natalia Xiomara-Chieffo, Secretary  
Mario Borelli  
Rudolph Brooks  
Wanda Brown-Claitty  
David Cooney  
Timothy Diemand  
Kathryn Emmett (ex officio)  
LaShanda B. Harvey  
Nichelle A. Mullins  
Paul Sarkis  
Martha Stone (ex officio)  
Eric Sussman  
Antonia Thompson

#### **Advisory Board**

Miriam Berkman  
John Brittain  
Brett Dignam  
L. Phillip Guzman  
Wesley Horton  
Elizabeth Morgan  
Eileen Silverstein  
Preston Tisdale  
Stanley A. Twardy, Jr.  
Stephen Wizner

#### **Executive Director**

Martha Stone, JD

65 Elizabeth Street  
Hartford, CT 06105  
Phone 860-570-5327  
Fax 860-570-5256  
[www.kidscounsel.org](http://www.kidscounsel.org)